

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY  
INTERVIEW WITH BOYKO VABBILEV ON "PANORAMA"  
SOFIA, BULGARIA  
JULY 18, 1994

Q: Your Excellency, first of all I'd like to thank you for giving us this interview especially for "Panorama." My first question is what are the aims and the first results of your visit here in Bulgaria, and in the region.

Secretary Perry: My reason for coming here, first of all, was to reaffirm the strong American commitment to European security in general and Bulgarian security in particular. And, as a part of that program, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defense and will meet this evening with the President. We have had a very fruitful discussion on ways of increasing cooperation between our two defense establishments.

Q: Do you think there is a real basis for real defense cooperation between America and Bulgaria?

Secretary Perry: There is a very strong basis for defense cooperation between our two countries. Indeed, we signed today a memorandum of cooperation which was the architecture and the blueprint for how that cooperation could be conducted. But even though we just signed it today, we've already begun that cooperation. There are several programs already underway which are very productive and very promising for both countries.

Q: The Partnership for Peace program was criticized because of the slow process of integration into NATO structures. Will it be the only guarantee for the East Europeans, including Bulgaria, till the end of this century?

Secretary Perry: Bulgaria's security hinges on many different factors. Partnership for Peace makes, I think, an important contribution to that, and the extent to which it contributes to that will depend to a very great extent on how much Bulgaria participates, on what programs it is involved in, because it is not just signing the Partnership for Peace, it is its participation that benefits the security of the people.

Q: Which are the strategic priorities of USA on the Balkan peninsula, and are Bulgaria and Macedonia among them?

Secretary Perry: The strategic priorities of United States on the Balkan peninsula are recognizing the sovereignty of all of the countries in the Balkan peninsula; that is of direct and material interest to the United States. We have a clear interest in seeing peace and stability in the Balkans, and inasmuch as that affects the peace and stability throughout Europe, indeed throughout the world, the greatest threat to that peace and stability today is the

danger of the war in Bosnia. Indeed, the United States' interests in Bosnia are twofold: first of all, we have a strong national security interest in seeing that the war does not spread. And secondly, we have a humanitarian interest in taking what actions we can take to relieve the suffering and reduce the suffering and violence that's going on in Bosnia. Both of those objectives can be best met by having a peace in Bosnia, which is why we are cooperating in the peace plan through the contact group.

Q: But do you think that if the war in Bosnia continues, that military force from abroad should be implemented in order to stop the conflict, or do you think it should have happened by now?

Secretary Perry: I believe that the political solution is by all odds the most desirable solution in Bosnia. That's why we are working so hard with the contact group to try to achieve that peace plan. I would point out that to the extent the US has military forces relating to that activity, they are part of peace-keeping activities. They are not here, not in this region, as combatants in a war. And they are doing such things as forcing the no-fly zone, which reduces the casualties of civilians on the ground by aerial bombardment - and making air lifts and air drops of humanitarian relief. These are military forces, but they are here for peace-keeping operations.

Q: With the new realities, do you think NATO needs a renewed military doctrine or is NATO's existence under doubt now?

Secretary Perry: NATO's existence's is of no doubt. It is more important in many ways than it has ever been. I think very strong evidence of that is the number of countries in Eastern and Central Europe seeking to join NATO. NATO is a security institution which first of all can serve as a vehicle for the security integration in Europe, as well as bridging the Atlantic and bringing America into that security relationship. I believe that not only is Europe vital to the security of America but America is vital to the security of Europe. NATO provides that security institution - and it's very, very important - and from the U.S. point of view, we continue to place very high priority on NATO activities.

Q: But there's no longer a Warsaw Pact. Who is the eventual military opponent of USA and NATO now?

Secretary Perry: You don't have to have an opponent, a military opponent, to have national security problems. And we see all around us in Europe national security problems and national security concerns. And this security institution has served very well in the past decades in dealing with these security concerns when there was an enemy. Now in the absence of an enemy, it still can deal with those security concerns, and I say again that the interest, the strong interest, of nations all over Central and Eastern Europe to join NATO suggests the validity of that argument.

Q: Your Excellency, maybe you will allow an additional question.

You said that you are not here to recruit football players. Do you think that the football championship in America somehow acted on the feelings of the Americans to the Bulgarian people?

Secretary Perry: All of the Americans that I talked with were very, very impressed with the skill and capability of the Bulgarian team. And it made a very strong impression in the United States. It brought to the United States a new image of Bulgaria which was a very positive image.

Q: Your Excellency, we have to thank you for this interview!

Secretary Perry: Thank you. It was a great pleasure talking to you.